

Dialogue

The newsletter of the Human Resources Division, September 2011



The BIG Event: Assistive Technology

On September 23, 2011, a statewide event to display, discuss, and promote assistive technology will be held at the Hynes Convention Center in Boston, Massachusetts. Named “Products and Technologies that Change People’s Lives – Universal Design and Assistive Technology in Massachusetts,” the all-day event will showcase assistive and inclusive technology through a conference, expo, design competition and summit.

Through this special event, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) seeks to elevate assistive and inclusive technologies to a whole new level of significance in the Commonwealth. The Institute for Human Centered Design is

the convener of the events of the day which will showcase state-of-the-art and evolving technologies and products for people with disabilities and older people, for consumers, employers, educators, and others to demonstrate how emerging and cutting edge technology can improve the ability to work, live, learn and play across the spectrum of ability and age.

The conference website has information on how to register, participate in the design competition, and become an exhibitor. To be added to the mailing list for general information, send an email to: info@changepeopleslives.org, or visit www.changepeopleslives.org. ■

Keeping Up with Technology: New Commonwealth Policy Accommodates Segway Usage

As technology has expanded, so has the understanding of what makes for a creative reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities. Case in point: the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has refined and adopted a new policy regarding

the Segway® Personal Transporter. Once perhaps considered mainly as a recreational device for cutting-edge technology buffs, the Segway has become a more mainstream mode of transportation; it turns out to have a tremendous benefit



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as a convenient mobility assistance device for people with mobility impairments.

To comply with new law, the U.S. Department of Justice updated its regulations for the Americans with Disabilities Act to broaden the scope of protected mobility devices beyond the typical understanding of wheelchairs and scooters. Addressing the ever-evolving landscape of acceptable mobility devices for people with disabilities, the Commonwealth issued its policy to all Massachusetts agency heads and ADA Coordinators on May 20, 2011. This policy adds Segways to the list of approved reasonable accommodations, for use in buildings under Commonwealth jurisdiction, custody or control.

The policy extends to all power operated devices used for mobility by people with disabilities, but which were not designed specifically as medical devices. The Commonwealth's Segway policy contains common-sense measures such as:

- Indoor speed is limited to a walking pace of three (3) miles per hour.
- Users must exercise caution when exiting elevators and turning corners.
- Vehicle should be put in standby mode or powered off within five (5) feet of magnetic or x-ray security screening devices to prevent damage.
- Security personnel may request a demonstration that the vehicle is operational as a mobility device, but may not ask the user questions about the nature or extent of the person's disability.
- Restrictions for usage are permitted in historical buildings where maneuvering space is limited or delicate items are on display.

The policy does not extend to privately owned leased buildings, who must promulgate their own Segway policies. ■

Segway User Kevin Lambert: A Man on the *Move*

Kevin Lambert is a man who moves with a purpose. For almost four years, Kevin has worked in specialized population outreach for the Department of Veterans Services, a job that has him crisscrossing the state to help Massachusetts veterans who are homeless, incarcerated or recently released, and those navigating the often complex world of higher education. It's already a rigorous schedule. Then consider that Kevin, only a few months into a sixteen-month deployment in Iraq with the Army, amid fierce combat during some of the earliest days of the war, suffered broken bones in his spine and carried on in serious pain nonetheless. It was an injury that has dramatically altered the course of his life. Home from combat, Kevin endured a year of medical

testing, and another year of wondering anxiously what would come next for him and his wife. The muscles in his legs atrophied. The Department of Veterans' Affairs declared him 100 percent service connected disabled. Kevin would never need to work another day, and indeed, many might have considered him 100 percent unemployable. But that's not Kevin's style, and it's not how his story goes. A donated Segway – a surprisingly compact set of wheels, gyroscopically balanced and battery powered – and a work environment that allows Kevin to use it on the job has made all the difference.

At first glance into Kevin's seventh floor, corner cubicle, it's easy to miss the Segway tucked



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inconspicuously into a small space against the wall. The window view is more eye-catching, and Ronnie, a friendly, beautiful Black Labrador and Kevin's 24-hour canine companion, more engaging to a stranger. "More people want to pet the dog than ride the Segway," laughs Kevin (who never lets anyone ride his Segway anyway: "You wouldn't ask someone to borrow their wheelchair!"). But the quiet, unobtrusive Segway, and a work environment with a Segway-friendly policy, helped build back Kevin's physical and psychological strength.

"It has made all the difference!" Kevin exclaims. Socially, his world opened up again with the introduction of the Segway. He can take it up into the mountains on handicapped accessible trails. He can use it at the beach. He can cruise through store aisles on shopping errands. "This thing is an amazing piece of equipment," he says. "Even when the building's not accessible, I can make it accessible." The tires don't mark floors or drag in mud, and there's even a little plow for the snow.

Kevin does have limited use of his legs, though not without pain, and standing on a Segway to ride is better therapeutically than sitting in a chair. "It allows me to still use my legs, whereas if I didn't have it I wouldn't go out." For quick errands from his Downtown Crossing office in Boston up to Beacon Hill, where his father works, Kevin doesn't need to worry about moving his truck, paying for parking to only go a few blocks away, or vying for limited handicapped parking spaces. Kevin uses the Segway mainly for those slightly longer distances (apparently it can go up to about 24 miles on one charge, though he's never pushed it that far). "I walk as much as I can otherwise, and I don't really use it at home."

Kevin has always used the Segway on the job and says he's never had a real problem using it in a state office building. Accompanied by his service dog, Ronnie, and with his cane and a small handicapped license plate on the front of the Segway, security officers have always known it was a legitimate mobility device and given Kevin due deference. The Department of Veterans Services and then-Secretary Thomas Kelley were unquestionably welcoming of Kevin's Segway and easily made room for it in the flow of the office. In federal buildings, however, Kevin met more resistance and had to work a little harder to foster that acceptance. Up he went to Beacon Hill to make his case for the use of Segways in Massachusetts, now in official policy as a result of his efforts. "I talked about my use of the Segway, how it changed my life, and I gave a demo all through Ashburton and the State House. They even got to see me run into my father at full speed to show how it wouldn't hurt." Kevin always observes safe and reasonable speeds on the Segway, which will stop itself to minimize collision damage. "The worst is it runs over your foot," though wide tires distribute the weight so it's essentially painless. He nods his head toward Ronnie, who is dozing under Kevin's desk next to her doggie bed. "It runs over her paw at least once a month." She doesn't seem concerned.

The Segway was what got Kevin moving and working again, and it took a lot of effort and determination on Kevin's part to even become a good candidate for a Segway, so he doesn't take it for granted. "I can use my legs. For three months without it, everything went into atrophy. Trying to get out of that was pretty painful." But he did it. These days, Kevin is appreciating his vantage point from atop his Segway. "It's really like I gained 100 pounds and I'm a little wider." ■



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Are we making progress?

Figure 1. The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Employees**, March 2007 to June 2011

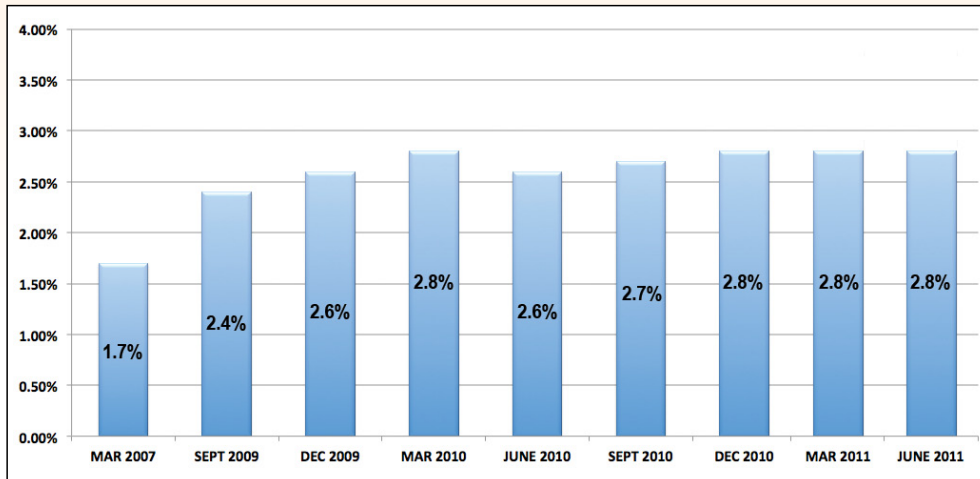


Figure 2. The Percentage of Self-Identified **Executive Branch Management Employees**, March 2007 to June 2011

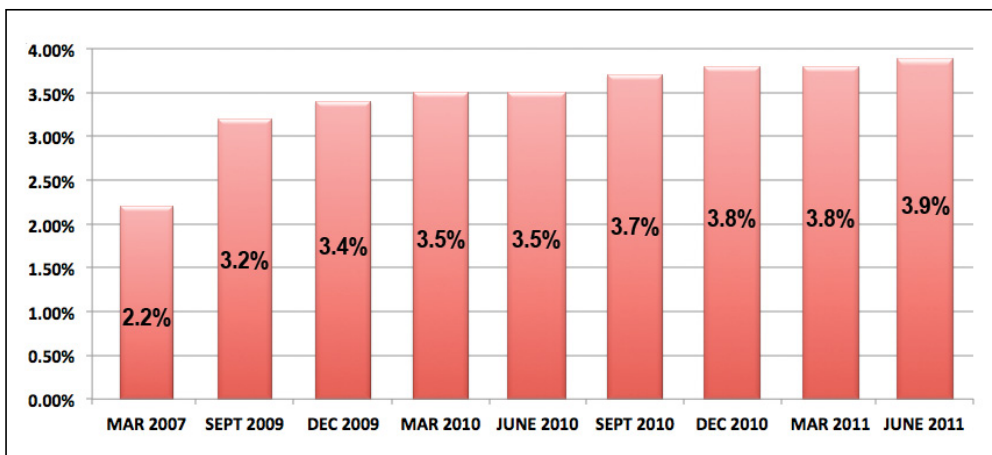
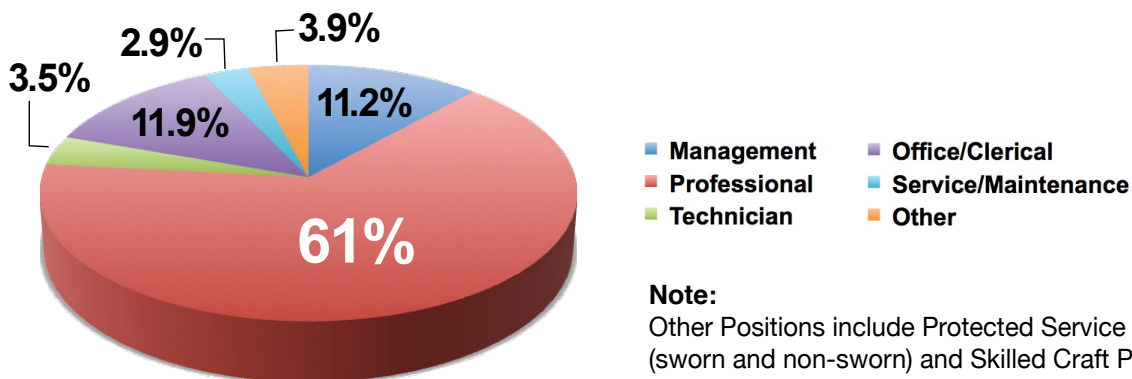


Figure 3. The Percentage of Self-identified Executive Branch Managers and Employees by EEO-4 Job Category as of close of Quarter 3, FY11



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